

## EXPLORING OUR P.E.O. HISTORY IN OHIO

*This program is about how P.E.O. took root and thrived in Ohio*

The history of any state chapter is comprised of many elements: the chapters within the state and the P.E.O.'s who make up those chapters, the projects of the State Chapter, and the State Chapter's relationship with International Chapter (Supreme Chapter as it was called at that time) and its officers.

P.E.O. came late to Ohio. In 1927, the year Ohio State Chapter was organized, there were already 21 State Chapters, and another, New York, was awaiting the organization of Ohio in order to be organized also.

Perhaps it is not surprising that most of these 21 State Chapters were to be found in those states immediately surrounding Iowa or in the West, for the mid and late 1800's were a time of westward expansion for America. Americans were on the move and Iowa made a convenient stop-over for many. P.E.O. was contagious!

Florida was P.E.O.'s twenty-first chapter, and for many years P.E.O.'s only State Chapter in the southeastern United States. To Iowans belongs the credit for P.E.O.'s establishment in Florida, for many had followed the Florida land boom to settle there.

P.E.O. came late in other respects to Ohio. Perhaps Ohioans, too, were riding the tide of the American movement west. Michigan's first chapter had been organized in 1890 and during the following twelve years Michigan provided Supreme Officers from its chapters, although a State Chapter (or Grand Chapter, as it was then called) did not yet exist in Michigan. When Michigan finally was organized it was as a State Chapter, the very first, the designation "Grand" having been dropped early in 1919.

It is curious that of Ohio's first nine chapters, three were in Toledo. Perhaps P.E.O. spread across the Michigan line.

Ohio has not been a proselytizing state, either. Those states contiguous with Ohio's borders have been formed through other influences. Pennsylvania was organized some eleven years after Ohio, Kentucky twenty-seven and West Virginia thirty-two years later.

It was the influence of Iowans living in Iowa that brought P.E.O. to Ohio, for friends and relatives there prevailed upon Julia Bishop of Loveland, Ohio, to start a P.E.O. chapter. Although Julia Bishop was not a P.E.O., she was granted permission by Winona Evans Reeves, then President of Supreme, to select a charter list in her home town. In June of 1911, the Supreme Organizer, Edith Prouty, arrived to initiate all 11 charter members of Chapter A. Another seven years were to pass before Chapter B, Toledo, was organized, and still another nine before there were enough chapters to consider a State Chapter. In those days it took nine chapters to form a State Chapter. Eleven chapters made a State Chapter mandatory.

The times in which Ohio State Chapter was organized were times of optimism and expectancy. They were characterized by such statements as Coue's, "Every day in every way, life is getting better," and by F. Scott Fitzgerald's, "In those days life was like the race in Alice in Wonderland. There was a prize for everyone."

As a national organization, P.E.O. had indeed grabbed the brass ring on the merry-go-round. The biennium during which Mrs. Alice H. Scott was President of Supreme, 1925-27, saw the building of the Memorial Library, which had first been proposed in 1896 as a Founder's Memorial Building by members of college Chapter S. Two of our founders, Alice Bird Babb, and Mary Allen Stafford, lived to know of it, and Mrs. Stafford actually turned the first spade of dirt at the ground breaking ceremony. Neither, however, lived to see its completion and dedication in 1927, following which P.E.O. headquarters were moved into the building on the Iowa Wesleyan campus in Mr. Pleasant, Iowa, where P.E. O. had begun some fifty-eight years before.

Other events memorable in P.E.O.'s history were underway, too, for President Alice Scott had sent two representatives from Supreme to Nevada, Missouri, to investigate Cottey College, which had been offered as a gift to the sisterhood by Mrs. Alice Cottey Stockard. Their report must have been favorable, for in the month following the organization of Ohio State chapter, the Supreme Convention, meeting in Oklahoma City, voted to accept Mrs. Stockard's gift. Names will reoccur in this story of P.E.O. in Ohio so I would like to tell you who these two ladies who investigated Cottey were: Harriet Newell, President of Missouri State Chapter, a relative of our own Past State President, Frances Newell, who served Ohio State Chapter as Historian, and Edith Prouty Pritchard, the organizer of Ohio Chapter A.

Getting a little ahead of our story I would like to mention another name which will appear, that of Zora Y. Knight, who in 1933 as President of Supreme and presiding at the 1933 convention in Kansas City, conceived the idea of taking the entire convention down to Nevada, Missouri, to see Cottey. Slated to be voted upon at this convention was a motion to divest P.E.O. of Cottey, for the responsibility for Cottey's upkeep and care seemed onerous for the times. Her ploy was successful for the following day the Convention soundly defeated this motion to sever ties with Cottey. Nellie Cooley, by then Past State President of Ohio State Chapter, was one who made this trip to Cottey.

This was the atmosphere into which our State Chapter was born.

Julia Bishop, now Mrs. Coleman, original instigator of Chapter A, had in 1926 been appointed district organizer for Ohio. The following June of 1927 she called together representatives of all Ohio chapters to discuss the feasibility of an Ohio State Chapter. The chapters were agreeable to the plan and members of Chapter A were selected for the convocation.

Thus it was on the warm afternoon of September 5, 1927 that members and delegates from the nine Ohio P.E.O. chapters, 39 in all, met at Julia Bishop Coleman's home for introductions and refreshments. They were all to be the personal guests of Chapter A

members during the two day convocation. Shortly after two p.m. that afternoon they were “motored” out to the “beautiful” country home of Chapter A’s president, Mrs. Bessie Lee, for the opening session of the convocation.

Presiding that day was Mrs. Zora Y. Knight, Organizer of Supreme Chapter, assisted by Mrs. Alice H. Scott, Supreme President. Two other visitors were present: the aforementioned Mrs. Hallie Newell and Mrs. Mary Long, a Past State President of Washington State Chapter. Guards were chosen and a secretary pro tem. The meeting opened with the singing of “America” followed by the ode (the old ode, which preceded the ode known to us as “old”). At this meeting and the following ones the order of business was interspersed with devotions, singing, and music, much as State Conventions today are. This particular afternoon Mrs. Knight read a letter from Supreme President Alice Scott pertaining to the Ohio convocation, after which Julia Coleman moved that a State Chapter be organized. With this motion approved, committees were appointed and then Mrs. Knight presented charters to three of the chapters present. This is interesting for these chapters completed the quota of nine necessary to establish the State Chapter. These chapters were: G, Athens; H, Cincinnati; and I, Toledo. The meeting then adjourned for a rest, followed by a dinner party, after which the evening session opened at Mrs. Lee’s home. Chapter A put on the model meeting, and Chapter F, Wilmington, gave an exemplification of the ritual. Mrs. Knight then addressed the convocation, telling of P.E.O.’s ideals and philanthropic work.

At the next morning’s session, again at Mrs. Lee’s home, the minutes were read and all 18 delegates responded to roll call. The petition for dispensation for an Ohio State Chapter was read by Mrs. Knight, followed by the reading of the state by-laws by Mrs. Coleman. State officers were then elected, Mrs. Julia Bishop Coleman becoming Ohio State Chapter’s first president and Nellie Cooley the first State Organizer. Four delegates were chosen to attend Supreme Convention the next month in Oklahoma City. One of these must have been considered an alternate, for at that time every three chapters were entitled to one representative to Supreme Convention; today it is one to every seven. As it turned out, two of these delegates, one of whom was Nellie Cooley, did not attend. The last order of business that morning was a request by Toledo that the first convention be held there in May of 1928; this request was granted.

The afternoon session saw the installation of the new officers. Supreme President Alice Scott then addressed the group on Mary Allen Stafford and her influence on P.E.O., of how P.E.O. had grown from its original seven founders to a total membership of 41,000 women. She also spoke about the Memorial Library and about the Educational Loan Fund which had helped 1,600 girls to that date attend college. The fund in 1927 totaled \$400,000. (Today it stands at \_\_\_\_\_).

Toledo had asked for the first convention. Although proposed for May of 1928 the convention was not held until September of that year. One wonders why. Were the members of B, or the officers of State Chapter not yet ready to convene so soon after organization? At this first convention in Toledo, 42 delegates were present, for Nellie

Cooley had been busily organizing chapters. The first was Chapter J, Cleveland (west side), which had hoped to be part of the organizational convocation. However, J was to be composed of a number of dimitting members whose dimits had not come through in time for them to organize prior to convocation. In those days no P.E.O. business was transacted during the summer. Nellie organized three more chapters that year, two within three days and just eight days before Christmas, and two more chapters the following spring, for a total of six chapters. At that time the organizer took all the parts in the ritual; today the organizer merely serves as president with members of the sponsoring chapter taking the other parts.

Present at Ohio's first convention were Supreme President Ola B. Miller and Winona Evans Reeves, by then Editor of the Record. New York State Chapter sent two representatives from its state board and it would be interesting to know if they had yet held their first convention or were "looking ours over" in anticipation of their own first one.

The second convention of Ohio State Chapter took place only seven months after the first. This convention was held in Columbus with the same Supreme representatives in attendance. Nellie Cooley was elected the second president of Ohio State Chapter to serve the year 1929-30; in 1930, she presided at Ohio's third convention held in Cleveland.

Because the history of AH is so closely involved with that of Ohio State Chapter we should take a closer look at those who have served on the Ohio State board from Chapter AH. Nellie Cooley at the time she was on the board was a member of Cleveland (east side) Chapter D, to which she had dimitted in 1924 after moving to Ohio. She was initiated by Chapter J, South Dakota, in 1918. Chapter D was mother to two chapters: M, which Nellie organized, and AH to which Nellie dimitted as a charter member.

The credit for the idea of new chapter AH belongs to Sibyl Bowen of D who became AH's first president. Of AH's 14 charter members, four were dimits, the other two besides Nellie and Sibyl being Frances Armstrong from Q, Cleveland, and a cousin of mine, Frances McDonald from Chapter F, Wilmington. The remaining ten, including Gertrude Wilson and Rose Penfield, daughter of P.E.O. founder Suella Pearson Penfield, were all initiates. The chapter was organized in January of 1938 and at the 1938 State Convention Sibyl Bowen and Ava Sabin accepted our charter. Chapter AH was asked to conduct the model meeting at the 1939 convention in Cleveland. Its initiate was a real one, Frances McDonald's daughter, Marjorie.

Intended to be a Cleveland Chapter, imagine the consternation when the members of AH read the charter and found their designation to be Cleveland Heights. The meetings between the State Organizer and the prospective members had always taken place in Cleveland Heights so she assumed that would be their designation. It took a little doing to "un-do" this error, but knowing it could be done once helped us do it again, when AH's designation changed to Mentor, Ohio.

Viola Nixon was initiated into AH in June of 1940 and Vera Lockwood in June of 1945. Viola was a close friend of Nellie Cooley. Although initiated after Viola, Vera Lockwood made it to the State board first.

In the early days of Ohio State Chapter, there was no order of succession and it was not unusual for an officer to serve two years in the same office. At that earlier time it sometimes happened that a woman was elected to two or three offices on the State Board and then not elected to another. This caused hard feelings and some of these women went inactive as a result. One state officer during the thirties held three offices for a total of five years and was not elected to another for 25 years, after which she followed the by then established order of succession to become State President. The order of succession has changed over the years and will in all likelihood be changed again. Some offices require more time and attention than do others. And some offices flow more naturally into another than do others. It takes a bit of trial and error to find a really workable, comfortable order of succession.

Although Vera Lockwood went up the line from Treasurer to become President of Ohio State Chapter in '53-'54, presiding at the 1954 convention in Toledo, she, like Nellie, went from Organizer to President. As Organizer she had formed three chapters, two within 11 days. Viola Nixon also organized three chapters, all in less than a month's time. Viola went on the State Board as Corresponding Secretary; before she become President she had served in every office but one, that of Treasurer. Her convention was in Oberlin in 1962. Betty Rinderle, who dimitted to AH from BE, Sandusky, organized two chapters during her term as Organizer, twice the current average of one chapter per year.

I tried to find some membership totals for Ohio during our early years, but it was not until 1953-54 that membership totals were kept. To find any prior to that date means counting noses chapter by chapter. However, in 1954 when Vera was President there were about 2,500 P.E.O.'s in Ohio. That number grew to 3,400 during Viola's Presidency, and the most recent figures show there are about \_\_\_\_\_ of us in Ohio. The total sisterhood now numbers about \_\_\_\_\_ members.

For a State Chapter, aside from being a coordinator of local chapters, a contact point for unaffiliates, and a channel to International for its chapters, also exists for reasons of its own, which, of course, are to better serve both P.E.O. its projects and its members than could otherwise be done without its existence.

P.E.O.'s of Ohio have every reason to be proud of our State Chapter. We are one of the very few which offers a State scholarship. This began in 1950 with a private donation at convention which was amplified by members of convention until it reached \$650 at convention's adjournment. It then came from the general fund and was awarded to a first year Cottey applicant who had been accepted for study by Cottey Junior College. Should there be no such first year student, the scholarship was awarded to a returning second year student. If not awarded at all in any one year the

funds were allowed to accrue until the following year. First awarded in 1951, the scholarship was \$200 which was soon raised to \$400 and then to \$600, and again to \$1,000. It was non-renewable. There was also a privately endowed scholarship, administered by the Ohio State Chapter, which also went to Cottey students. This named scholarship is still available to Ohio Scholarships. It is named in honor of Frances Small and was given by her husband in her memory. In 1978, it amounted to \$1,800 divided between two students.

One of our projects, the Welfare and Trust Fund, was set up to help P.E.O.'s in need. Although it helped a few of our members it was never much used and about 1969 was dissolved. The monies, which never exceeded \$2,000 went into the Grant-in-Aid Fund.

The Grant-in-Aid Fund was intended to help Ohio women attend Cottey Junior College, or to help IPS students attending Ohio colleges, if they had the approval of the IPS Board of Trustees. In some cases, when deemed advisable, the fund was used to help women pursue post high school study. This fund was provided by voluntary gifts its accumulated interest. Grants were limited to 20% of the principal of the fund but cannot exceed \$400. In 1979, there were five Grant-in-Aid students, one IPS student and four Cottey Junior College students. They received varying amounts but the total to the five was about \$1,700.

One of our failed projects was the Ohio Home Project. It was expected that \$75,000 would be gathered from donations over a ten year period. At the end of 20 years the fund still only totaled \$20,000. Having been given its chance this project was put to rest about 1970 for lack of interest and the money in the fund was given to Cottey College. Our State By-Laws provide that should any of these State projects which are financially self-perpetuating ever be dissolved, the funds are to go to a national P.E.O. project.

Ohio has eight reciprocity groups: in Cleveland, Toledo, Cincinnati, Dayton, Columbus, Akron, and Canton. At one time, there was one in Alliance. Some of these such as Cleveland have included such outlying chapters as Ashtabula and Oberlin. The reciprocity groups were founded as follows: Cleveland, 10/1928; Columbus, 4/1931; Toledo, 12/1933; Cincinnati, 1/1936; Dayton, 9/1938; Akron, 1944; Canton, 6/1950; Alliance, 1958.

There was a P.E.O. Group in Ohio, in a retirement village in Waverley, Ohio. It was formed in 3/15/67 and was called the Bristol Village Group.

Although an attempt was made many years ago to establish a college P.E.O. Group on the campus of Ohio State University, the response was poor. Possibly the time was not right, possibly college students haven't the time in this era or the need for such contacts. It is still possible that such a group will yet develop at OSU or another university somewhere in Ohio.

I wish someone would write the definitive history of P.E.O. in Ohio. It would have to be someone with the time to pursue and peruse the records reposing in Chapter

President's boxes or State Officer's boxes or to compile as yet unrecorded data through some other means. There is a lot here of interest yet to be uncovered.

The thing I have learned – or relearned- through this exploration is that my original indoctrination into P.E.O. was incorrect. P.E.O. is not a rigid organization at all, but one that is both viable and growing to meet the needs of both its own members and those of women everywhere. Having survived some hard times it is able to accept new responsibilities as the needs of women become evident. Through this exploration I have seen the changes which occurred in the far past; I am aware of those that have occurred in the recent past. And I see new changes on the horizon.

The one thing that does not change is P.E.O.'s dedication to the ideals and aims of the Sisterhood. More and more I see these ideals and aims focusing on the needs of women, particularly in the field of education. When you explain P.E.O. to your friends, stress the educational emphasis of our Sisterhood, one which is both nationally and state supported.

Bonnie Grinsaulus, AH-OH  
5/6/79

*WITH GRATEFUL ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF HELP TO:*

Stella Clapp, author, Out of the Heart, published by the P.E.O. Sisterhood, 1968  
Carol McDougald, Corresponding Secretary, Ohio State Chapter  
Frances V. Newell, Historian, Ohio State Chapter and Past State President  
Betty w. Rinderle, Second Vice-President, Ohio State Chapter  
Rosemary A. Wood, Executive Secretary, Supreme Chapter P.E.O. Sisterhood

*And to these officers of Chapter AH:*

Addie Carter, President  
Evelyn Fletcher, Corresponding Secretary  
Gertrude Wilson, Charter Member